



THE MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION

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Overview of the Desecration of Hickory Ground

What is Hickory Ground?

Hickory Ground is a place sacred to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation located in our original homelands in what is now Alabama. When we were forcibly removed to Oklahoma in the 1830s, the last capital of the historic Muscogee (Creek) Nation was at Hickory Ground. In all the years since, we have never lost contact with our origins and sacred place in Alabama.

Located near the modern-day town of Wetumpka in central Alabama, archaeologists have determined that Hickory Ground has been occupied for 10,000 years. We are the original occupants and keepers of this land. To this day, Hickory Ground remains important for our culture and religion, and it is the final resting place for many Muscogee (Creek) chiefs and ancestors. Because of its significance to our people and to American history, on March 10, 1980, Hickory Ground Tribal Town was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

What happened to Hickory Ground?

After the forcible removal of the southeastern tribes in the 1830s, there were no remaining tribes in Alabama. The few individuals of mixed Indian ancestry who remained in southwestern Alabama after removal renounced their tribal citizenship and did not maintain any group organizational structure. Starting in the 1950s, some of these people began to identify themselves first as the "Perdido Friendly Creek Indian Band of Alabama and Northwest Florida Indians" and later as "Creek Nation East of the Mississippi." This group admitted that it was "newly formed" as of 1951, that it had not retained a general tribal organization, and that it had no treaty dealings with the federal government. The Creek Nation East of the Mississippi later renamed itself the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

In the early 1980s, Poarch acquired Hickory Ground with a federally-funded historic preservation grant, which was awarded to preserve the site and to protect its archeological integrity. Then, in 1984, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) provided federal recognition to Poarch. The BIA included Hickory Ground in Poarch's initial reservation lands, despite the fact that Poarch had no tribal connection to the site and that Poarch's other reservation lands are clustered 135 miles away in Atmore, where Poarch claims to have historically resided.

Over the next few years, archeologists identified large-scale cultural remains at Hickory Ground and warned Poarch that any construction would disturb the remains and cause irreparable harm. Despite these warnings, the Poarch Band began planning to build a casino on top of Hickory Ground.

How was Hickory Ground desecrated?

When Poarch obtained the federal preservation grant to buy Hickory Ground, it came with a 20-year protective covenant preventing development on the property. The covenant expired in 2000. Just before the covenant expired, Poarch requested that the government delegate historic preservation responsibilities of the site to Poarch. The National Park Service granted this request.



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Soon after the covenant expired, and without telling the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Poarch began a large-scale excavation that would desecrate Hickory Ground. The Poarch Band removed human remains and funerary objects from over 57 Muscogee (Creek) graves so that Poarch could build its second casino.

In 2013, the Poarch Band held a grand opening for its new Wind Creek Casino Wetumpka. The Las Vegas-style resort features 2,500 slot machines, a 16,000-gallon saltwater aquarium, several bars and restaurants, and a 20-story hotel and spa – all built directly on top the resting place of Muscogee (Creek) ancestors, a sacred place the Poarch promised to protect.

The government shares responsibility for what happened at Hickory Ground. The desecration could have been prevented by any one of numerous agencies and officials. Federal authorities at the Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and National Park Service had multiple opportunities to stop the desecration and hold the Poarch accountable. Officials in these agencies were alerted to what the Poarch Band was doing by numerous sources, including Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizens, the State of Alabama, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and even some of their own employees. Yet, they stood idly by while the Poarch systematically violated a host of federal laws and regulations.

What must be done now?

Hickory Ground is still sacred, and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation has filed a lawsuit to have the land returned to its natural state and the remains reinterred in their original resting place.